Kevin Costner in *JFK*.

'JFK' gets caught in conspiracy

BY JOE DeCHICK
The Cincinnati Enquirer

JFK isn't a movie as much as it's a revival meeting with Oliver Stone barking, "Hey, folks, let's put on a conspiracy-theory show!"

With audiences captive for 188 minutes — and no intermission — the director preaches the gospel of cover-up of the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

Through characters portrayed by an all-star cast — chiefly Kevin Costner as New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison, the lone man to bring to trial a criminal case in connection with the murder — Stone presents his assumptions and hypotheses, achieving an awkward level of docu-speculation.

Stone makes a complex, compelling case for conspiracy. He doesn't offer his case as the truth — though it may wrongly be perceived that way. It's only a theory. And the theory powers the movie.

But the movie doesn't entertain. Drama, emotion and characterizations are script afterthoughts.

An obsessed Superman

Stone and author Zachary Sklar base their screenplay on two books, including Garrison's *On the Trail of the Assassins*.

In a nutshell, Stone and Sklar theorize that Lee Harvey Oswald (Gary Oldman) was, as he claimed, "just a patsy," a fall guy for CIA-trained anti-Communists who offed Kennedy because he had gone soft on Cuba and stated his intention to withdraw from Vietnam.

The New Orleans link: Oswald spent the summer of '63 there, consorting with these renegades.

The film focuses on the investigation started in 1966 by Garrison and his team of prosecutors.

Garrison comes off as a JFK-obsessed Superman fighting for truth, justice and the American way. Only occasionally does Stone show his stubborn alter ego bickering with co-workers and ignoring his wife (Sissy Spacek) and kids.

Stone/Garrison eventually compiles enough scraps of evidence to fill the Pentagon, inevitably linking the Kennedy assassination to Vietnam. Thankfully, Jim Garrison is not linked to Jim Morrison.

Stone draws on 28 years of material — much of it unavailable to Garrison in his 1969 conspiracy trial of a Crescent City businessman (Tommy Lee Jones). Thus, it's bogus of Stone to portray Garrison's plight as if it benefited from a quarter century of research.

Visually, at least, *JFK* is provocative. Oscar-worthy editing combines everything from archival footage to the Zapruder home movies to Stone's re-enactments. At times it's hard to tell factual images from the docu-fictional.

Jones, Oldman and Joe Pesci manage not-bad bit parts in a film bulging with more than two dozen.

And Donald Sutherland plays an ex-colonel named X. The role, along with his pyro-informant turn in *Backdraft*, ensures him cinema's Deep Throat Award for 1991.

Deep Throat . . . Watergate . . . Having picked most of America's '60s scabs, maybe Stone will next return to the '70s. Heaven help us.

Movie review

JFK
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(R; profanity, violence, adult themes)
Kevin Costner, Sissy Spacek. Running time: 188 minutes.